

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MARR, TH

SUBJ: CAMBODIAN EVACUEES

1. IN SEEKING TO FORECAST THAI REACTION TO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF CAMBODIAN EVACUEE QUESTION, FOLLOWING GENERAL BACKGROUND SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND.

2. THAI ARE GENERALLY SENSITIVE ON SUBJECT OF REFUGEE GROUPS. DESPITE EFFORTS TO SHIP THEM OUT, SOME 90,000 VIETNAMESE (PRIMARILY ORIENTED TOWARD NORTH VIETNAM) WHO FLED LAOS IN 1946 REMAIN CLUSTERED IN NORTHEAST THAILAND AND THAI CONSIDER THEM A SERIOUS POLITICAL AND SECURITY PROBLEM. THAI HAVE ALSO HAD EXPERIENCE WITH PROMINENT REFUGEES SUCH AS U NU FROM BURMA AND PHOUMI NOSAVAN FROM LAOS, AND THESE HAVE GIVEN RISE TO LONG-TERM DIPLOMATIC PROBLEMS AND POLITICAL EMBARRASSMENTS.

3. AT MOMENT, OF COURSE, THAI ATTENTION IS FOCUSED ON POTENTIALLY VERY LARGE NUMBERS OF CAMBODIANS WHO MIGHT COME STREAMING INTO THE COUNTRY OVERLAND IN THE EVENT OF A GKR COLLAPSE. NUMBERS OF THEM ARE REPORTEDLY ALREADY ARRIVING. ON MARCH 26, DEFENSE MINISTER PRAMAN TOLD THE PRESS THAT THAILAND COULD NOT AFFORD TO ACCEPT LARGE NUMBERS OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES. FOLLOWING DAY, PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT SAID THAT THAILAND WOULD HAVE TO PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION FOR THOSE NEEDING ASYLUM, BUT THAT IT SHOULD BE ONLY

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TEMPORARY. THUS, THAI OFFICIALS HAVE MADE SOMEWHAT CONTRADICTORY

STATEMENTS. THE ONE THREAD RUNNING THROUGH THEM HAS BEEN AN INDICATION OF RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT REFUGEES.

4. SITUATION CONTEMPLATED REFTEL IS, OF COURSE, A SPECIAL CASE IN SEVERAL RESPECTS. NUMBERS OF EVACUEES WOULD BE LIMITED BY COMPARISON WITH OVERLAND REFUGEES, BUT COMPOSITION WOULD BE SELECT. WHILE PHYSICAL PROBLEM OF ACCOMMODATING THESE EVACUEES IN THAILAND WOULD BE INSIGNIFICANT BY COMPARISON WITH FLOODS STREAMING VER BORDER ON FOOT, MAKEUP OF GROUPS (KEY INDIGENOUS PERSONNEL AND US GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND FAMILIES) WOULD POSE SPECIAL POLITICAL PROBLEM, AT TIME WHEN THAI ARE SEEKING BY EVERY MEANS TO GET IN POSITION TO BE ON BEST POSSIBLE TERMS WITH WHATEVER GOVERNMENT EMERGES IN PHNOM PENH.

5. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT RTG WOULD NOT DENY THESE EVACUEES TEMPORARY HAVEN IN THAILAND. PERMANENT RESIDENCE ON OTHER HAND IS SOMETHING THAI WOULD NOT WISH TO CONTEMPLATE, AND WE DO NOT RPT NOT BELIEVE IT WISE WVEN TO RAISE SUCH QUESTIONS WITH RTG PRIOR TO ARRIVAL OF EVACUEES.

6. PARA 2 REFTEL IMPLIES USG IS PREPARED TO TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUPPORT OF CAMBODIANS WE BRING TO THAILAND. IF THAT IS CORRECT, IT WILL EASE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH RTG. BIG REMAINING QUESTION (APART FROM NUMBERS) IS HOW LONG WE PLAN TO KEEP THEM IN THAILAND. AGAIN, UNLESS WE ARE IN A POSITION TO ASSURE RTG THAT WE WILL MOVE EVACUEES ONWARD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, WE CONSIDER IT UNWISE TO BRING MATTER UP IN ADVANCE. THAI WILL, OF COURSE, BE ANGERED AND SENSE THEIR SOVEREIGNTY FOUTED BY LACK OF ADVANCE CONSULTATION, AND WE WILL HAVE TO MAKE PEACE WITH RTG AS BEST WE CAN. IT WOULD, OF COURSE, BE PREFERABLE TO INFORM THEM AHEAD OF TIME IF WE CAN IN FACT ASSURE THEM THAT WE WILL MOVE THE EVACUEES OUT OF THAILAND QUICKLY.

7. WE CANNOT IN ANY CASE COUNT ON MUCH HELP FROM RTG IN LOGISTICS, BUT MUST BE PREPARED OURSELVES TO TAKE COMPLETE CHARGE OF CAMBODIAN EVACUEES BROUGHT TO THAILAND BY USG.

8. IF DEPARTMENT IS IN POSITION GIVE US MORE GUIDANCE ON NUMBERS AND ONWARD MOVEMENT PLANS, WE WILL REVIEW QUESTION OF CONTACT WITH RTG PRIOR TO POSSIBLE EVACUATION.

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